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ABSTRACT

In September 1988, seven pilot school boards in Dumfries and Galloway Region, Scotland, met for the first time. The pilot scheme sought to learn about the functioning of school boards before they came into statutory existence in the 1989-90 school year. The seven schools represented a cross-section of Regional schools and ranged from a one-teacher elementary school to an academy with about 1,000 students. Board membership comprised parents, teachers, and co-opted members. Initial assessment procedures included questionnaires completed by 27 of 29 parent members, observation of 11 board meetings, interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators involved with school boards, and analysis of board meeting minutes and other relevant documents. Assessment focused on parent members' backgrounds, the experience of board membership to date, training, and election procedures. Major achievements of the pilot scheme's first four months were: (1) demonstrating community interest in the boards; (2) raising parental awareness of board activities through various communication strategies; (3) identification of training needs and dissemination of background information to board members by the Region; (4) establishment of regular patterns of meetings, with good attendance by all concerned; and (5) adaptation of Regional systems to provide the kinds of information that boards need. Problem areas included some parents' feelings that the boards were doing nothing and the absence of semiskilled and unskilled workers on the boards. (SV)

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PILOT SCHOOL BOARDS

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Pamela Munn
Sally Brown

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Report arising from the SCRE evaluation of pilot school boards in Dumfries and Galloway, funded initially by the Region and subsequently by the Scottish Education Department.

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PREFACE

In mid 1988 Dumfries and Galloway decided to set up seven pilot school boards in advance of the legislation bringing school boards into statutory existence. SCRE was commissioned to provide an independent perspective on the pilot scheme and this report is the first of a series of three reports designed to reflect various aspects of that pilot scheme. This report is deliberately entitled 'First Impressions'. The pilot boards have been in existence for only four months and so it would be premature to draw firm conclusions on the basis of such a short life. Board members themselves may change their views about membership as they look back over the experience of a year.

This report is divided into 6 main sections. Section 1 describes the focus for the report and the various kinds of evidence we have been able to collect. Section 2 describes the kinds of parents who have been elected to boards, while Section 3 looks more generally at the experience of membership to date. The training needs of board members are addressed in Section 4 and a brief review of election procedures is given in Section 5. Finally, we try to sum up briefly the achievements of boards in Section 6.

The report would not have been possible without the help and co-operation of a great many people. Parents, teachers, headteachers and co-opted members all gave generously of their time to be interviewed. We had regular telephone interviews with one parent member from each board and we are grateful for the time and effort they devoted to these. The Regional school board co-ordinator and the Director of Education have been unstinting in giving us access to documents and in sparing time for interviews. All this help has been very much appreciated. Anne Bankowska carried out a preliminary analysis of the questionnaire responses. Finally Janette Finlay typed successive drafts of the report swiftly and accurately. Our thanks to them both.

Pamela Munn
Sally Brown

December 1988

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

In September 1988, 7 pilot school boards in Dumfries and Galloway Region met for the first time. There were 4 primary schools, 2 secondary schools and 1 combined primary and secondary involved. The schools were chosen to represent a range of the kinds of schools in the Region and were drawn from a wide geographical base. They ranged from the 1 teacher primary school at Colvend, with a roll of 19 pupils, to Lockerbie Academy, with a roll of about 1,000 pupils. The purpose of the pilot scheme was to learn as much as possible about the functioning of school boards before they came into existence 'properly' in school session 1989-90. In order to provide an independent view of the pilot, the Region commissioned SCRE to carry out a monitoring exercise. The focus of this first report to the Region is on the following:

Parent members' backgrounds
The Experience of Board Membership so far
Training
Election Procedures.

We have deliberately entitled this report 'First Impressions'. At the time of writing boards have been in existence for about 4 months and each board has met on average once a month. These are early days, both for board members themselves to reflect on their experiences and for us to draw any conclusions about the exercise.

We end the report with a summary of what we see as the key features of the pilot to date and with some suggestions about the implications of these for the operation of boards next year. These are tentative suggestions. We have tried, therefore, to separate our reporting of evidence from our interpretation of that evidence. We should also make it clear that it was not in our remit to hold in question the desirability of school boards. Before reporting the impressions of board members about their experience let us first be clear about the sources of evidence on which this report is based.

The evidence

This account of the pilot exercise is based on the following sources of evidence:

1. A questionnaire to all parent members of boards about themselves, their links with the school and their expectations of board membership. Twenty seven of the 29 parent members replied to this questionnaire.

2. Direct observation of 11 board meetings. One board has been observed three times; five boards have been observed twice; one board has been observed once; and one board, Gretna, has not been observed formally, although its meeting at the Induction Day was observed.

3. Telephone interviews with a parent representative after all board meetings not directly observed, seventeen interviews in all.

4. Face to face interviews with 5 parents, 3 headteachers, 2 teachers, 2 co-opted members, the School Board Co-ordinator and the Director of Education.

5. Observation of the Induction Day.

6. Analysis of appropriate documents, including minutes of school board meetings, the Regional response to the Government's proposal to introduce school boards, and documents relating to setting up the pilot exercise.

SECTION 2: WHAT KIND OF PARENTS ARE MEMBERS OF SCHOOL BOARDS?

Board membership comprises parents, teachers and co-opted members, the precise numbers of parents and teachers depending on the school roll and staff numbers. In addition , the headteacher is present as adviser and the Regional Councillor and a representative of the Director of Education are entitled to attend and speak at Board meetings. None of these three has the right to vote. For the moment, however, our concern is with parent members. What kind of parents are members of boards? How do they see their role?

At a recent board meeting, concern was expressed by a Regional Councillor that board members were 'incomers' with little direct knowledge of experience of the Scottish education system and, therefore, were unlikely to be sympathetic to its aims. Is this borne out by the evidence? The short answer, at least to the 'incomer' part of the question, is no. The overwhelming majority of parent members are long term residents in Dumfries and Galloway. Seventeen parents have lived at their present address for more than 5 years, and only 3 have lived at their present address for less than 1 year. Two of these 3 have lived in the Region for 5 years or more. Residence, however, is only one indicator; how does the 'incomer' charge stand up when we look at the educational background of the parents? As we can see from Table 1, 50% of the parents were educated in Scotland.

Table 1: Where did you go to school? (N =27)

Scotland	14
England	9
Wales	1
A combination of the above	1
Elsewhere	2

(Seven of the 27 parents had attended a fee paying school.)

The evidence on the gender and social class composition of the boards is, perhaps more striking. There are 15 men and 14 women as parent members. However, this apparently equitable distribution disguises the fact that one board, St Joseph's College, is an all male affair and that the primary school boards tend to have a preponderance of women. There is no all female board although in Moffat, Gatehouse and Colvend the female/male ratio is 3:1 in terms of parent members.

We need to be cautious about the social class origins of our 27 parents since our evidence is limited. However, it is interesting to note that of the 13 parents in full-time occupations, 11 could be unambiguously categorised as 'middle-class', that is to say belonging to a profession such as chartered engineer, minister of religion, general manager of a company and the like. Nine parents,

predominantly women, had part-time occupations, and these too tended to be 'middle-class', such as teacher, locum pharmacist, and occupational therapist. Five parents described their full time occupation as housewife and mother. The obvious conclusion is that semi and unskilled workers are conspicuous by their absence from the pilot boards. The social class composition of school board membership in general, is of course, a key area to be explored in the future, given both board claims to represent parents and their responsibility to improve communication with parents.

Parental contact with the school and region

So far we have concentrated on the parents' own backgrounds and characteristics. We thought it important, however, to find out whether board members had been drawn from the schools' PTAs and School Councils. We were also interested in parents' contacts with education more generally in the Region, as all this information could give some clues about how aware parents were of local education policy and practice. Furthermore it would help to shed some light on whether parent members were those who had always taken an active interest in school matters through membership of parents' organisations, or whether boards were encouraging different kinds of parents to take an active interest in whole school affairs.

Have pilot boards attracted only those who are members of the schools' PTAs? The short answer again is no. Parents not involved in PTAs have become board members. Twelve of the 27 parents are members of the PTA. Equally interesting is the fact that 15 parents were not PTA members and 11 of these had no other links with the school for which they were board members or with the education service in general. Tables 2 and 3 show parental involvement in more detail.

TABLE 2: PTA MEMBERS LINKS WITH SCHOOLS (N = 12)

	Other links with board school	Links with other schools/region
Yes	5	4
No	7	8

TABLE 3: NON-PTA MEMBERS LINKS WITH SCHOOLS(N = 15)

	Other links with board school	Links with other schools/region
Yes	4	4
No	11	11

Links with schools for which parents were board members were, for example, being married to a staff member or attending evening classes in the school. Similarly links with other schools or the Regional education service generally could be through supply teaching or marriage to staff members.

The picture is, therefore, of a mixture of the kinds of parents who became board members in the pilot scheme. Some have had previous links with the school but 11 parents had no such link before joining the board. There are equal proportions of men and women, although one board has all-male parent representation. Where a uniformity stands out is in the social class composition of boards, with middle class occupations predominating.

We now go on to consider the experience of board membership so far, not only from the point of view of parents, but from teachers, headteachers and co-opted members too.

SECTION 3: THE EXPERIENCE OF BOARD MEMBERSHIP

It is worth reiterating here, what we said in the introduction. The pilot boards have been in existence for only a short time and so members can only give their first impressions of membership. As time goes on and membership becomes less of a novelty, it may well be that these impressions change. All we can do is to remind our audience that first impressions are not always the same as final impressions, although sometimes they are!

Boards have been meeting on average once a month, more often than the Director of Education expected. Meetings are held in school, in the evenings and last around 2 hours 30 minutes. There have been occasions when they have lasted longer than this and at least two meetings have begun at 7.30 and ended after 10.30 pm. Needless to say this means an exceptionally long day for all members and especially for the headteacher and teacher representatives who may have been at school from 8.00 am. All meetings have been tape-recorded, microphones being prominently displayed in the middle of the tables and board members interrupted in full flow when tapes have to be changed. Attendance at meetings has been good. The overwhelming majority of parents and teacher members have attended all meetings. In only one board has a parent representative missed two meetings. All these meetings have been attended by the headteachers and by either the school board co-ordinator or the Director of Education. There have been 31 meetings to date and so this represents a tremendous investment of time, expertise and support, on the part of the Region.

A glance at the table below reveals the wide variety of topics which Boards have discussed or about which they have been given information. As will be seen, discussion has been dominated by the role and function of boards. Despite the impressive list of items considered the overwhelming feeling from the members is that they have done nothing. Examples from four boards will illustrate this.

Board 1 (Discussing the possibilities of a newsletter to parents) What would we put in a newsletter? We have done nothing. (parent)

Board 2 Two members arrived at the meeting saying "We must decide to <u>do</u> something tonight" (parent - co-opted member)

Board 3 "The main concern has been to get information and the other concern is to see that we're <u>doing</u> something." (parent)
"Nobody's made any substantive sort of decision." (teacher)

Board 4 "They seem to have been involved in the higher administrative points rather than the grass roots... But it is early days. They have to get to grips with their functions before they do anything else." (headteacher)

LIST OF TOPICS DISCUSSED BY BOARDS. THE TOPICS DISCUSSED MOST FREQUENTLY ARE PRESENTED FIRST

Role and Function (includes discussion of constitution)
School Lets
Induction Day
Publicity for Board Meetings (includes discussion of distribution of minutes and agendas)
Co-opted Members
Appointment of Clerk
Election of Chair and Vice-Chair
Staff Appointments Procedures and Board Involvement
Communication with Parents
Information Pack
Headteacher Reports (includes discipline policy, curriculum, assessment, community education)
School Finance
Role of SCRE
SCAMP
Staffing Provision
Road Safety/ Transport
Rules for Christmas Concerts
EIS Action
Visit by Education Minister
Formation of Sub-Committee
Videoing of Board Meetings

There are a number of possible explanations for this state of affairs.

1. The topic which has concerned boards most frequently, is their aims and objectives. Boards are still trying to find their feet and are unsure about what they can and cannot do. It can be argued that each Board needs to be clear about its purpose before it can take action. This takes time, as the headteacher quoted above makes clear.

2. The area which most Boards have focussed on as an area of activity (where something might be done) is communication with parents. Many ideas have been suggested; for example, a newsletter; information sheets on specific aspects of school policy, such as composite classes; a cheese and wine party; a parents' meeting; the availability of board members at parents' evenings. All these things take time to get going and so there is as yet, little to show for the various strategies aimed at communicating with parents.

3. There are various statutory responsibilities which boards have to accept and these can take up a great deal of time at meetings. One such responsibility, for example, is school lets, in out of school hours. In order to exercise their responsibility, boards need information about letting procedures. At one observed meeting this item alone took 45 minutes, at another it took 1 hour. Most of this time was spent giving details of letting procedures with board members questioning various aspects of these. It was finally agreed that lets would be delegated to the Head, the teacher representative and the clerk to the board. Similarly information about the Region's procedures in senior staff appointments takes time to ingest.

4. The statutory powers of school boards are quite limited. They have a right to ask for a good deal of information, and many boards have received reports from headteachers, either at the Head's suggestion or at the suggestion of a member. These reports have covered a variety of topics, such as assessment in the primary school, work experience for pupils and school discipline. There are areas, however, over which the board as such has no direct power.

5. The kind of information presented to boards by the Region, has necessarily been general. It has concerned, for example, the usual staffing structure in schools, the kind of curriculum on offer, the structure of education in the region and so on. It is our impression that parents would prefer information about their particular school and use this as a way of coming to terms with their functions rather than abstract discussions of their constitution and aims and objectives.

6. Perhaps the most important reason for feeling that boards have achieved little so far, is that there is little to achieve. We were struck by the expressions of positive support for the schools expressed to us both privately in interviews and publicly during board meetings. For instance, in discussing the role of the board, a member drew attention to the fact that, "at the time of its (the board's) formation, the general feeling amongst parents was that there was nothing wrong with the school, that it was a great school and that no changes were needed". And other parents in a different board, said, "quite honestly, one of our problems was drawing up an agenda. We thought, what more do we need to do? We don't have the problems of .... discipline problems, you know, so we had to sort of think, well what good can we do?" The same concern was voiced obliquely by a member of a third school board. The school had had a glowing report from HMI and this member was concerned that the minute would show the board's concentration on the lack of social space for senior pupils in the report rather than its implicit delight at the HMI report in general.

The general impression from board meetings is of everyone feeling their way, receiving a great deal of information on a variety of topics and being unsure about whether and how to use the information

they have received. It seems to us, however, that particularly in the area of communicating with parents, boards are already achieving a good deal and we return to this matter in our concluding section.

The role of the headteacher and teacher members

So far, much of what we have reported has concentrated on parents' views. However, a key role is played by the headteacher. Both from interview and direct observation, it is clear that heads want to work with boards, and are anxious to provide boards with all the information about the school which boards want. In our view they have displayed a good deal of patience and skill in explaining the way their schools operate and the rationales for their policies. One head, for example, gave such a clear exposition of the primary school's curriculum and assessment policies that the board has decided with the head's agreement to offer a curriculum evening so that all parents have the opportunity to hear this. Indeed questions about the government's proposals in these areas have been generated and as a result the board has decided to write to the Education Minister questioning these proposals. In contrast, another has shown some reluctance to respond immediately to a request from the school's staff that the board discuss the teachers' misgivings about the government's reforms. As one parent put it, he was largely in sympathy with the teachers' views but believed the board should not become involved in political matters.

In another instance a head found himself reassuring the board that the school's plans for attracting adults back into the classroom would not encourage 'lay-abouts' to lounge around the school, and exert a bad influence on the pupils.

In almost all instances, the heads have taken initiatives in suggesting the kinds of information about the school which the board might find helpful. This information has ranged from a general discussion on the school handbook to more specific information on, say, the 16+ curriculum.

In interviews with 3 heads three main things about their role in the boards became clear.

First, and most obviously, it has resulted in an increased workload. Not only do board meetings themselves have to be attended, (all the boards meet in the evenings) but time has to be spent preparing for them. This is so both in the formal sense of having papers to prepare, but also in ensuring that one is well briefed on the various items on the agenda. Even though Heads get time off in lieu, their time off during the day, has to be made up somewhere else.

Secondly, boards can increase the heads' workloads in less obvious ways. This is best summed up by the following comment from a headteacher:

> The school boards have to encourage liaison between parents and [encourage a] PTA. That's great! But it's me that's got to go to a PTA meeting... Again it's legislating for a commitment on my behalf that is in fact voluntary. It does nark a little bit. Tonight I've got a school board meeting. Tomorrow I've got a PTA meeting I can't not go to a PTA meeting. The parents want to see me there (and rightly so).

There is a hint from the few teachers and headteachers whom we interviewed that headteachers especially could find themselves spending more time communicating about what they do, than actually doing it. There could be a subtle change of emphasis in the role for the headteacher increasing the public relations aspect of their job.

Thirdly, heads have been assiduous in trying not to chair the board meetings. For the most part they have been skilled at making suggestions when the boards have been struggling with an agenda item and in providing the information asked for in a straightforward way. There have been a few parental complaints about jargon but to our mind presentations have been remarkably jargon free.

In contrast to the active role played by the heads, the teacher representatives on the boards have had a very low profile. In observed meetings their contribution has been minimal, a couple of sentences at most, and it is by no means unusual for the teacher representatives to stay silent through the whole meeting. Part of the explanation for such a subdued role, lies in the nature of the kinds of information which board members have been receiving. Much of it can be safely assumed to be 'old hat' to the teachers. As one teacher put it:

> I don't think that anything has arisen where the fact that I'm a teacher here, has been any more relevant than the fact that I'm a golfer. ...I don't think they're anywhere near decisions which would sort of impinge on the working conditions of teachers or anything like that at all. I don't think they've got near it.

Indeed where teachers have chipped in from time to time it is to point out, for example, that their attendance at a curriculum evening would be voluntary, or that, in a discussion about the Region's transfer of staff policy, they were employees of the Region not of the school.

The teachers have a difficult role to play. On the one hand one might expect them not to be an echo of the headteacher's opinions; on the other hand, it could be extremely awkward for the teachers to challenge the heads' perspectives on matters. This is an area where more time is needed before any proper appreciation of the teacher's role on boards can be made.

The role of Regional Councillors and co-opted members

Regional Councillors for the wards in which boards are constituted have been regular attenders at meetings. In general their presence has been warmly welcomed by parents as they can help to present a Regional perspective on matters coming before the board. This is particularly the case where Councillors are also members of the Education Committee. Regional Councillors can anticipate difficulties in attending board meetings once boards for each school are established. It could be a physical impossibility for them to be present at all meetings if boards meet frequently and there are a number of schools in their wards.

Boards have the power to co-opt two members and have adopted a range of criteria in selecting the members they wish to adopt. These have included:

- a local employer
- someone with financial expertise
- someone from a part of the school's catchment area not represented on the board
- someone with a knowledge of community affairs
- a representative of a community group already using the school.

Most boards have had no difficulty in finding people willing to serve as co-opted members although in small communities it can be awkward to select members who are not already parents and therefore ineligible for co-option.

Some parents felt they had been rather rushed into choosing people to co-opt especially as they were very unsure of the nature and function of the board. The co-opted members themselves could be a little unsure of their function. However, at least one was adamant about the criteria to be used to judge the boards' success:

> A year's a very short timescale for something like this. I think all we can hope for is that we'll have been felt to be needed by the school. If, at the end of the year, teachers think we're just a pain in the backside, I'm afraid we've failed. You can't go in... and break the mould and start all over again, it's impossible. I think the school board has got to be a consultative machinery. It's got to act as a valve between parents and teachers and it won't work unless it's trusted and respected by the educational side of it and the parents.

SECTION 4: TRAINING

So far the Region has provided training in a variety of ways. First of all, every board member was provided with an Information Pack and a copy of the board's constitution. Secondly, an Induction Day for all members was held in September. Thirdly, two boards likely to be involved in senior staff appointments have been offered training and a similar approach to training on school budgets is planned. We have no data on these last bits of training and so this section concentrates on the Information Pack, Induction Day and the kinds of training needs which board members have identified.

Information Pack

One of the powers school boards will have is to ask for information from the school and the Region on a range of matters including:

- information about the school and education generally in the area
- financial information about the school and other schools in the Region
- school policy on curriculum, assessment, discipline, uniform.

The information pack was an attempt to provide school board members with some basic information on key aspects of Scottish education at a national level. It contained short descriptions of, for example, the structure of the education system, the management structure of primary and secondary schools and general information on the curriculum. It also provided a summary of school board members' duties and responsibilities. In addition to this regionally produced pack, board members were given a collection of government pamphlets explaining such matters as TVEI, Standard Grade and the modular system.

All those interviewed, bar one, said the information pack had been very useful. It was seen as a reference tool, to be dipped into, as and when needed, rather than read assiduously cover to cover. The format of the pack with information clearly and succinctly presented was generally praised too. One sheet of information per topic was thought to be about the right amount of detail.

The questions of what kinds of information to provide, in what form and when to provide it are key areas. It could be argued that the provision of general information about the Scottish education system is of less immediate direct interest to board members than specific information about their particular school. It is the old dilemma of whether it is better to move from the general (the Scottish

education system as whole) to the specific (the individual school) or vice versa. It may be that the board members' feelings of having done nothing, reported on pages 4-5, are partly because boards have been focussing on the general, rather than on the specific, although this is by no means the only explanation of these feelings.

The Region's school board co-ordinator herself, is clearly aware of the challenges posed in providing information in a way that meets the needs of the various boards. She stressed that information had to be presented in manageable chunks, otherwise parents could be put off from reading anything or indeed feel completely overwhelmed and mystified about the school system. She added:

> What additional information should you provide to make the basic information intelligible?... If I provide (boards) with raw numbers on computer printouts (on school budgets) one thousand and one questions could arise from that. Now, should I pre-judge the questions by preparing a handout... or let the questions genuinely emerge, recognising that different boards may well have different questions?

A parent similarly identified knowing <u>who</u> to ask about <u>what</u> as central to the functioning of the boards:

> ...the one thing, that the board feels that it misses out on, (is) it's not quite sure who to ask for things. It's not that the information isn't there... you have to stumble about a bit to find out who to ask. ...the headteacher (or the Region) would be the source for most of your information... but it's only one person's source of information you're getting. ...It's a question of knowing who to ask.

This parent identified one of the successes of the Induction Day as the introduction it offered to a range of possible sources of information such as the Scottish Parent Teacher Council, and the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations.

We think it important to try to differentiate amongst the different kinds of information and needs training that board members might have. It may be helpful to think of information needs as being at 3 levels:

- information about curriculum, assessment, discipline, and rules which is specific to individual schools.

- information about the Regional education policy, structure, provision and so, which individual Regions could provide.

- information about the national system which it might make sense to have centrally produced.

Board members will require more or less information about each of these levels depending on how much they know already. Flooding everybody with everything runs the risk we mentioned earlier of overwhelming board members and increasing their feelings of insecurity.

Induction Day

The Induction Day was held on a Saturday in Dumfries. In telling board members about the purposes of the day, the school board co-ordinator consistently stressed that the day could not be seen as a training day. Rather the day gave an opportunity for all board members to meet each other and to discuss a variety of aspects of the role of the board members.

The format of the Induction Day was as follows: brief presentations to all those present from a range of speakers on topics such as, the context in which pilot boards were operating; important elements in the board scheme; the Danish perspective; and parent-teacher links in Dumfries and Galloway. This was followed by a series of parallel workshops on a variety of themes including committee skills, parent teacher communication, roles and responsibilities of board members and training needs. Time was set aside during the day for boards to have a brief meeting on their own and at the end of the day there was a summing up session.

The school boards co-ordinator produced a very comprehensive account of perceptions of the value of the Induction Day, based on evaluation sheets which participants completed anonymously. We will not duplicate her analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the various components of the day. Rather, we concentrate on the overall impressions of parents collected via interviews and our own questionnaire. The aspects of induction day which parents found most helpful where:

i. the opportunity to meet members of other boards (8 parents)
ii. the presentation by Mr Finn Andersen on Danish school boards (5 parents)
iii. the discussion groups in general (5 parents).

Only 3 parents found the day generally unhelpful and this was perhaps because they were seeking definitive answers to questions about their role and function that nobody was in a position to give. One teacher found the day unhelpful too, as he/she had learnt nothing new. As mentioned earlier, what many parents found immensely reassuring was that other boards had similar problems to their own and that they were not unique in worrying about their functions. There is an interesting paradox presented by our data here. On the one hand, parents welcomed the opportunity presented by the Induction Day to share anxieties about the role and function of boards. On the other hand, when asked

in the questionnaire how well informed they were about their functions, 17 of our 27 parents said they were well informed and 10 were doubtful about what their functions were. Perhaps this reveals a difference between knowing in abstract terms what the boards' functions are and knowing what the board is really going to do.

Another aspect to the day which is worth mentioning is the opportunity it provided for boards to meet as a board. Four of the parents interviewed mentioned that this had been the first opportunity which members had had to meet on their own, without researchers, Regional representatives and various others being present. It gave board members a chance to relax - no tape recorders were present - and to find out a bit more about each other. Indeed one parent mentioned the benefits to be derived from board members meeting socially before the first official meeting, so that they had some chance to get to know each other before being plunged into official business.

A very few parents had had difficulties in attending the Induction Day, which was held on a Saturday. It was pointed out to us that parents who had business or work commitments had had to make arrangements to ensure their shops stayed open, for example. However, surprisingly enough there was no demand for a creche or similar child care facilities. The Region paid participants' travelling expenses to Dumfries where the Induction Day was held.

In the sense of giving board members an opportunity to talk to each other, the Induction Day was a success. However, parents did not enjoy being talked at especially by those who had no direct experience of boards.

Training needs

The Region has circulated board members with a questionnaire asking them to identify their training needs. From this exercise and from the work done by the school boards co-ordinator four main areas of need have been identified. These are:

1. chairing committees
2. clerking meetings
3. school finance
4. interviewing for senior staff appointments.

Committee skills as an area of training need is one which strongly emerged from our research too. Several of the current chairmen/women of boards have had little or no experience of chairing committees and are unsure of procedures. More generally, a few parents have said that they are unsure of the best way of making points in a committee. The following extracts give something of the flavour of the kinds of points which were being made:

> I think one of the things that came out of the last meeting is that... ten minutes watching John Cleese's training film, 'Meetings, Bloody Meetings' wouldn't come amiss.
>
> I think (the chairman) has now realised that there's going to have to be a guillotine applied to certain things.
>
> It took my mind a good hour to get into gear having left the domestic pandemonium... whereas the people who are involved (in committees) every day, (for them) it is a matter of course.
>
> I had never chaired a meeting in my life before and I was quite nervous.

School budgets also emerged as a area of possible training need but there was a division of opinion amongst those who thought that there was a training need here and those who thought that boards should seek outside expertise on the budget as and when necessary.

Clerking did not emerge as a training need, probably because we did not interview any clerks! Much depends on whether boards appoint their own clerk from amongst their own members or recruit clerks who already have experience as committee secretaries.

As mentioned above we have no data on interview training.

One of the clearest points to emerge from the data was that board members would have diverse training needs and that these needs would be specific to individual school boards. The best training, therefore, was in learning through experience of board membership. Learning about school budgets, for example, would be done best by the head producing information on the previous year's per capita allocation and explaining the basis on which this was allocated to departments. Training would therefore be on the basis of real examples derived from board members' own schools.

As far as training needs are concerned, again it seems important to differentiate specific skills such as chairing committees from more general skills such as negotiating or team building. It is worth drawing attention here to research we are carrying out on the training needs of part-time community education workers. This work shows that there are tight limits to the amount of time voluntary workers want or are able to spend on training. Indeed an over-emphasis on training can put people off voluntary work as they are often willing to commit themselves to the unfamiliar. Therefore, an elaborate training structure can create barriers to participation. This is important if we wish to attract a broad range of parents onto boards. Our research also shows that if people are giving up their time to attend training sessions, these sessions have to be seen to be relevant to their needs, and to be

delivered by people with credibility, ie those with direct, recent experience of the field. Furthermore, training has to be provided at a time when it can be applied in real situations. This would suggest that training on budgets, for example, should take place just before boards consider budgets in reality.

So far we have concentrated on training parent members of boards. The headteachers we interviewed identified training needs of their own, yet volunteered that the best training had been that provided by the experience of the pilot boards. Indeed their rationale for taking part in the pilot exercise was to learn about boards at a time when Regional and other help would be focussed on 7 boards rather than on the 133 brought into being in Dumfries and Galloway in autumn 1989 by the legislation. They identified committee skills as important and being able to 'think on one's feet', although whether one can be trained to be adept at this is another question.

SECTION 5: ELECTION PROCEDURES

Everyone recognised that the pilot boards were set up within a very short time and that consequently election procedures were a little bit ragged. The Director of Education was quite open in having as his main priority the establishment of pilot boards so that as much as possible could be gleaned from the way they operated; the piloting of election procedures was a less important priority. He said that probably the only thing that could be learned from the procedures in Dumfries and Galloway, was how not to run an election! However, this is unfair and our interviews and a study of regional documents relating to school boards reveal the following main points:

1. All the 5 parents interviewed thought the election procedures were fair and easy to understand. However, as these parents were those elected perhaps their views are to be expected.

2. The production of a brief statement about each candidate was seen as potentially a problem. The parents who produced a statement were unsure what to say. Heads wondered if they should correct the spelling and grammar of some statements.

3. Trying to achieve an accurate electoral roll was difficult, especially for primary schools with no data bases. One headteacher revealed that it had taken 2 hours 30 minutes simply to address envelopes, stick on stamps and insert three pieces of paper to be mailed to each parent individually. No doubt Regional authorities are now making their own arrangements to establish electoral rolls and devise their election arrangements in conformity with SED guidelines. The attractions of a centrally administered procedure in each Region, similar to those for general and local government elections must seem enormous. The only cautionary note here comes from a primary school head, and the Director of Education who believed parents were encouraged both to stand for election and to vote because they identified with the local school. There was a concern that an election procedure which seemed distant from the local school would not encourage wide participation.

4. Self-evidently, it is important that elections are not only fair but are <u>seen</u> to be fair. There were one or two letters from disgruntled parents lurking in the Region's files. Any hint that nomination or election procedures were unfair would lose boards' credibility.

Elections to establish parent membership of boards were not the only elections to take place. Boards had to choose their chairmen/women and vice chairmen/women. Each had to be nominated and

seconded by a board member. The boards went about this in different ways. Some boards pre-arranged matters by meeting informally beforehand and deciding on office bearers. Others held elections. In others again, the decision was made by default:

> Well, I wasn't there for the election of the chair and vice-chair and so I was elected chairman!

It was pointed out to us that the straightforward procedure for nominating and seconding chairmen could be problematic where numbers attending were small. If more than one candidate was nominated, board members might feel pressured into seconding a nomination. It is difficult to see what might be done about this.

Boards also have the power to co-opt two members and interestingly enough two boards have elected co-opted members as chairmen. This has been on the grounds that having no children in the school, they have no particular axe to grind and have the interests of the school in general at heart. Indeed, one of the comments most frequently made to us has been about the need to ensure that the 'right kind' of parent gets elected. When probed about what is the right kind, the typical answer is that is someone (a) who has an interest in the affairs of the whole school, not just the particular class or year group his/her child happens to be in; and (b) someone who will have a long-standing interest in the school.

SECTION 6: WHAT HAS THE PILOT SCHEME ACCOMPLISHED SO FAR?

In this section we concentrate on what we see as the achievements of the scheme as a whole to date, reiterating that we are reporting on a major innovation which has been in operation for only 4 months.

1. The scheme has demonstrated parents' interest in boards. All boards with the exception of the 1 teacher school at Colvend, had more parents standing for election than there were vacancies. Most of the boards had a reasonable turn out for the election averaging 51% (see Appendix A).

2. The individual boards have already done a good deal to raise parental awareness of their existence and of their activities. Almost all boards have had members of the public attending their meetings and have had their activities reported in the local press through their own efforts. Various strategies to improve communication with parents such as the production of information sheets, cheese and wine evenings, and general social evenings have been planned.

3. The Region has organised an Induction Day, set about identifying training needs, and begun developing training. It has also produced a good deal of information on a variety of subjects for boards, including papers on staff transfer policy, appointments procedures, lets, and school budgets.

4. A regular pattern of meetings has been established with an average of one board meeting a month, although some boards meet once every three weeks. These meetings have all been attended either by the Director or the school board co-ordinator - in itself a tremendous investment of time, energy, expertise, and support.

5. Regional systems are being adapted to provide the kind of information boards need. Cost centre analyses are now being produced for each school so that budgets can be more easily understood, for example.

In our view the most worrying feature of our data is that parents feel that boards are achieving nothing, and are going nowhere. It is worrying because if this feeling persists it will discourage parents from standing for election and indeed make it difficult for boards to find people willing to be co-opted. To quote one conversation:

> What would make you come off the board? If I felt we're ineffective. I've come off the community council because it was a complete waste of time.

As we've tried to show, the boards have already achieved a good deal in a very short time. What our data suggests is that there would be merit in boards reviewing their progress from time to time, in other words providing a mechanism to reflect on what boards had been trying to achieve and on how far they had achieved it.

The other point to draw attention to is the social class composition of the boards. As we mentioned earlier, semi and unskilled workers are conspicuous by their absence. Government plans to advertise the boards and to encourage participation in them, implicitly recognise the importance of wide participation for the boards' credibility.

However, we would not wish to end this interim report on a down beat. Much has already been set in motion by the pilot boards, especially in planning communication with parents. This is a key area and the success of the plans will be an important criterion for success and one focus of the next phase of the research.

APPENDIX A

PILOT SCHOOL BOARDS

Name of School	School Roll	School Board Composition	Number of Nominations	Papers Issued	Papers Returned	% Poll	Male/Female Ratio
Colvend Primary School	16	3 parents 2 Females	3				1 male
Gatehouse Primary School	112	4 parents 2 co-opted	12	140	116	83.0	1 Male 3 Females
Gretna Primary School	231	4 parents 2 co-opted	8	294	177	60.2	2 Males 2 Females
Langholm Primary School	215	4 parents 2 co-opted	7	283	196	69.2	2 Males 2 Females
Lockerbie Academy	985	5 parents 2 co-opted	11	1337	400	30.0	3 Males 2 Females
Moffat Academy	377	4 parents 2 co-opted	5	400	138	34.5	1 Male 3 Females
St Joseph's College	706	5 parents 2 co-opted	24	1200	399	32.0	5 Males

In all schools except Colvend, where no staff member is required, staff members have been duly elected.